SECRET SERVICE

BEING THE HAPPENINGS OF A NIGHT IN RICHMOND IN THE SPRING OF 1865

THE PLAY BY WILLIAM GILLETTE;

BY CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDGAR BERT SMITH

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SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Varney, wife of a Confederate general, has lost one son and another is dying from wounds. She reluctantly gives her consent for Wilfred, the youngest, to join the army if his father consents. The federals are making their last assault in an effort to capture Richmond. Edith Varney secures from President Davis a commission for Capt. Thorne, who is just recovering from wounds, as chief of the telegraph at Richmond. Capt. Thorne tells Edith he has been ordered away. She declares he must not go and tells him of the commission from the president. Mr. Arrelsford of the Confederate secret service, a rejected suitor of Edith's, detects Jonas, Mrs. Varney's butler, carrying a note from a prisoner in Libby prison. Arrelsford suspects it is intended for Thorne. The note reads: "Attack tonight. Plan 3. Use Telegraph." Arrelsford declares Thorne is Lewis Dumont of the Federal secret service, and that his brother Henry is a prisoner in Libby. Edith refuses to believe and suggests that Thorne be confronted with the prisoner as a test. An order comes from General Varney for Wilfred to report to the front at once. Edith is forced to carry out her part in the test of Thorne. The prisoner is thrust into the room alone with Thorne, who recognizes him as his elder brother, Henry Dumont. They put up a fake fight and Henry accidentally kills himself. Caroline Milford, Wilfred's sweetheart, goes to the war department telegraph office to send a message to Wilfred. Arrelsford suspects a double meaning and refuses to let it go through. He and Edith secrete themselves to watch Thorne, whose arrival Arrelsford expects. Thorne takes charge of the telegraph office. Arrelsford and Edith see Thorne alter a dispatch from the secretary of war. Thorne is shot in the wrist by Arrelsford when he attempts to send it. Arrelsford calls the guard, and when they appear Thorne turns the tables by ordering the arrest of Arrelsford. The removal of Arrelsford is stopped by the arrival of General Randolph. Thorne again begins sending the dispatch. Arrelsford protests, declaring Thorne is sending a forged order to weaken the lines of defense. Thorne is saved by Miss Varney, who produces his commission as chief of telegraph. She, having seen enough to convince her he is a spy, begs him not to send the forged order. After she leaves he tears it up. Thorne plans to escape from Richmond. Arrelsford calls at the Varney home and demands to see Edith. Mrs. Varney refuses. A sergeant appears with an order to search the house for Thorne. Wilfred Varney returns from the front wounded. Thorne appears, is arrested by Wilfred and turned over to the guard. Arrelsford immediately convenes a drumhead court-martial. Edith sees Jonas draw the bullets from the rifles of the guards.

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

In an incredibly short time, considering what he had to do, the old negro finished his task. He rose to his feet and stood staring triumphantly at the long stack of guns. He even permitted himself a low chuckle, with a glance across the hall to the court.

Now Edith Varney, who had observed him with mingled admiration and resentment—resentment that he had proven false to her people, her family; and admiration at his cleverness—stepped further into the room as he finished the last musket, and, as he started toward the lower end of the room to make good his escape, she coughed slightly.

Jonas stopped and wheeled about instantly, frightened to death, of course, but somewhat relieved when he saw who it was who had him under observation, and who had interrupted him. He realized at once that it was no use to attempt to conceal anything, and he threw himself upon the mercy of his young mistress, and, with great adroitness, sought to enlist her support for what he had done.

"Dey's gwine to shoot him, shoot him down lak a dog, missy," he said in a low, pleading whisper, "an' Ah couldn't ba'h to see 'em do dat. Ah wouldn't lak to see him killed, Ah wouldn't lak it noways. You won't say nuffin' about dis fo' de sake ob old Jonas, what always was so fond ob you ebah sense you was a little chile. You see, Ah jes' tek dese yeah"—he extended his hand, full of leaden bullets—an' den dey won't be no ha'm cum to him whatsomebah, les'n dey loads 'em up agin. When dey shoots, an' he jes draps down, dey'll roll him obah into de guttah, an' be off lak mad. Den Ah kin be neah by an' "—he stopped, and if his face had been full of apprehension before, it now became transformed with anxiety. "How's he gwine to know?" he asked. "If he don't drap down, dey'll shoot him agin, an' dey'll hab bullets in dem next time. What Ah gwine to do, how Ah gwine to tell him?"

Edith had listened to him as one in a dream. Her face softened a little. After all, this negro had done this thing for the man she—God forgive her—still loved.

"You tell him," whispered Jonas; "you tell him; it's de on'y way. Tell him to drap down. Do dis fo' ole Jonas, honey; do it fo' me, an' Ah'll be a slabe to you as long as Ah lib, no matter what Mars Linkum does. Listen," said the old man, as a sudden commotion was heard in the room across the hall. "Dey's gwine to kill him. You do it."

Nothing could be gained by remaining. He had said all he could, used every argument possible to him, and realizing his danger, he turned and disappeared through the back door into the dark rear hall. There was a scraping of chairs and a trampling of feet, a few words heard indistinctly, and then the voice of the old sergeant:

"Fall in! Right face! Forward—march!"

Before they came into the hall, Jonas made one last appeal. He thrust his old black face through the portieres, his eyes rolling, his jaws working.

"Fo' Gawd's sek, missy, tell him to drap down," he whispered as he disappeared.

Wilfred, not waiting for the soldiers, came into the room, and Caroline followed him.

"Where's mother?" asked Wilfred.

"She's gone up to Howard; I think he is dying," said Caroline. "She can't leave him for anybody or anything."

If Edith heard, she gave no sign. She stood motionless on the other side of the room, and stared toward the door; they would bring him back that way, and she could see him again.

"Wilfred, dear," asked Caroline, "what are they going to do?"

"Shoot him."

"When?"

"Now."

"Where?"

"Out in the street."

Caroline's low exclamation of pity struck a responsive chord in Wilfred's heart. He nodded gravely, and bit his lips. He did not feel particularly happy over the situation, evidently, but the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the men. They came into the room in double line, Thorne walking easily between them. They entered the room by the door, marched down it, came back, and ranged themselves opposite the stacks of arms.

"Halt!" cried the sergeant. "Right face! Take arms! Carry arms! Left face! Forward—march!"

Edith had not taken her eyes off Thorne since he entered the room.

As the men moved to carry out their last order, the girl awoke to her surroundings.

"Wait," she said. "Who is in command?"

"I am, miss," answered the sergeant.

"I'd like to speak to the—the—prisoner," continued Edith.

"I'm sorry, miss," answered the sergeant respectfully, but abruptly; "but we haven't the time."

"Only a word, sergeant," pleaded the girl, stepping close to him, and laying her hand on his arm.

The sergeant looked at her a moment. What he saw in her eyes touched his very soul.

"Very well," he said. "Right face! Fall out the prisoner!"

Thorne stepped out in front of the ranks.

"Now, miss," said the sergeant, "be quick about it."

"No!" said Wilfred sternly.

"Oh, Wilfred!" cried Caroline, laying her hand on his arm. "Let her speak to him, let her say goodby."

There was an instant's pause. Wilfred looked from Caroline's flushed, eager face, to Edith's pale one. After all, what was the harm? He nodded his head, but no one moved. It was the sergeant who broke the silence.

"The lady," he said, looking at Thorne, and pointing at Edith. As he spoke, he added another order. "Matson, take your squad and guard the windows. Prisoner, you can go over to the side of the room."

The sergeant's purpose was plain. It would give Edith Varney an opportunity to say what she had to say to Thorne in a low voice if she chose, without the possibility of being overheard.

"One of the servants," began the girl in a low, utterly passionless and expressionless voice, "Jonas, has taken the bullets from the guns. If you will drop when they fire, you can escape with your life."

In exactly the same level, almost monotonous voice, Thorne whispered a pertinent question:

"Shall I do this for you?"

"It is nothing to me," said the woman quietly, and might God forgive her, she prayed, for that falsehood.

Thorne looked at her, his soul in his eyes. If her face had been carved from marble, it could not have been more expressionless and indifferent. He could not know how wildly her heart was beating beneath that stony exterior. Well, she had turned against him. He was nothing to her. There was no use living any longer. She did not care.

"Were you responsible in any way for it?" he asked.

The girl shook her head and turned away without looking at him. She had not the least idea of what he was about to do. Not one man in a thousand would have done it. Perhaps if he went to his death in some quixotic way, he might redeem himself in her eyes, had flashed into Thorne's mind, as he turned to the guard.

"Sergeant," he said, saluting. He spoke in a clear, cool, most indifferent way. "You had better take a look at the rifles of your command. I understand that they have been tampered with."

"What the hell!" cried the sergeant, seizing a piece from the nearest man. He snapped open the breech-plug and drew out the cartridge and examined it. Someone had bitten off the bullet! He saw everything clearly. "Squad ready!" he cried. "Draw cartridges!"

There was a rattling of breech-plugs and a low murmur of astonishment, as every man found that his cartridge was without a bullet.

"With ball cartridges, load!" cried the sergeant. "Carry arms!"

When this little manuever, which was completed with swiftness and precision because the men were all veterans, was finished, the sergeant turned to the prisoner, who had stood composedly watching the performance which took away his last opportunity for escape, and saluted him with distinct admiration.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he said.

How Edith Varney kept her feet, why she did not scream or faint away, she could not tell. Thorne's words had petrified her. Her pride kept her from acknowledging what she felt. She had never dreamed of any such action on his part, and it seemed to her that she had sent him to his death again. How could she retrace her steps, repair her blunder? There was nothing to do.

It was Wilfred who broke the silence. He walked slowly up to Thorne and thrust out his hand.

"I would like to shake hands with you," he said admiringly, and for the first time in the long hours a slight smile quivered about the man's lips. It was a generous, spontaneous tribute of youth that gave him that moment of melancholy satisfaction.

"You'd Better Look at Your Rifles."

"Oh," thought Edith, watching her brother; "if only I dared to do the like."

"Is this for yourself?" asked Thorne, "or your father?"

"For both of us, sir," answered Wilfred.

Thorne shook him by the hand. The two looked into each other's faces, and everybody saw the satisfaction and gratification of the older man.

"That's all, sergeant," said Thorne, turning away.

"Fall in the prisoner! Escort left face! Forward—march!" cried the sergeant.

At that moment a man, breathless from having run rapidly, entered the room by the window. His uniform was that of an officer, and he wore a lieutenant's shoulder straps.

"Halt!" he cried, as he burst into the room. "Are you in command, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"General Randolph's on the way here with orders. You would please wait until—"

But Arrelsford now interposed.

"What orders, lieutenant? Anything to do with the case?"

The officer looked greatly surprised at this intervention by a civilian, but he answered civilly enough:

"I don't know what his orders are. He has been with the president."

"But I sent word to the department," said Arrelsford, "that we had got the man, and were going to drumhead him on the spot."

"Then this must be the case, sir. The general wishes to be present."

"It is impossible," returned Arrelsford. "We have already held the court, and I have sent the findings to the secretary. The messenger is to get his approval and meet us at the corner of the street yonder. I have no doubt he is waiting there now. It is a mere formality."

"I have no further orders to give, sir," said the lieutenant. "General Randolph will be here in a minute, but you can wait for him or not, as you see fit."

The sergeant stood uncertain. For one thing, he was not anxious to carry out the orders he had been given now. That one little action of Thorne's had changed the whole situation. For another thing, Arrelsford was only a civilian, and General Randolph was one of the ranking officers in Richmond.

"Move on, sergeant," said Arrelsford peremptorily. "You have all the authority you want, and—"

The sergeant held back, uncertainly, but the day was saved by the advent of the general himself.

CHAPTER XX.

The Last Reprieve.

General Randolph was evidently in a great hurry. Public affairs of great moment pressed upon him, and it was an evidence of the interest he took in the case of Captain Thorne that he gave him even a minute of his valuable time. He had come on horseback, and everybody could see that he was anxious to get through with his appointed task and get away.

"Ah, sergeant," he said, answering the latter's salute as he brought the guard to attention, and then his eye fell upon Captain Thorne. "You have the prisoner, have you?"

"Just taking him out, sir," answered the sergeant, saluting again.

"To prison?"

"No, sir."

"Where then?"

"To execute the sentence of the court, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed the general, looking hard at the sergeant. "He has had his trial, has he?"

But Arrelsford, who chafed at thus being left out of the game, now stepped over and took up the burden of the conversation before the sergeant could reply.

"We have done everything according to regulation, sir," he said, saluting in a rather cavalier manner. He did not like General Randolph. If it had not been for his interference, the affair would have been settled long ago, and he still cherished a grudge against the latter for having arrested a man so important as the trusted agent of the secret service. "The findings have gone to the secretary."

"Ah!" said General Randolph blandly. He did not like Mr. Arrelsford any better than Mr. Arrelsford liked him.

"Yes, sir."

"And he was found guilty, I presume?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And what are you going to do with him?"

"There is no time for a hanging now, and the court has ordered him shot."

"Oh, indeed. And what were the charges?"

"Conspiracy against our government and the success of our arms, by sending a false and misleading dispatch containing forged orders, was the particular specification."

"Well," said General Randolph, "I regret that the court has been misinformed."

"What!" cried Arrelsford, in great surprise. "The testimony was very plain."

"Yes, indeed, sir," interposed the sergeant.

"Nevertheless," returned the general, "the man is not guilty of that charge. The dispatch was not sent."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Dogs and Music.

Dogs as a rule like music. But it must be remembered that their acutely developed nervous system, which renders them such faithful watchers, also makes keen and high pitched sounds extremely painful to them. Thus the high notes of a trumpet or even of a violin are torturing to a dog, who will howl under the infliction. On the other hand, soft medium tones undoubtedly give many dogs pleasure. Cats, also, like many other animals, are fond of music. But no animals appear to suffer so much from keen, harsh sounds as dogs, and more in smooth, soft harmonies. A soothing "diapason movement" is the kind of music most agreeable to the intelligent dog.

Good Kindler.

In some sections kindlings are very hard to secure, owing to a lack of timber of all kinds. An inexpensive kindler may be made as follows: Take to one pound of resin three ounces of tallow, and while still hot after melting mix with fine sawdust, straw or any inflammable material and mold in small pieces about one inch square. One pair will start a fire in the stove.

A Souvenir.

"I suppose you wish your friends to share in your new automobile?"

"Oh, yes. The first time I smash it up I'll send you a wheel."

Disproved.

"You can't have too much of a good thing."

"Well, you just try that in a poker game with five aces!"

Comparisons.

"My family tree is as solid as an oak."

"My family tree is a peach."—Baltimore American.

Its Style.

"After all, it was the poor wooer who won the heiress."

"Yes, and wasn't it a rich joke?"

Classed as Criminals.

"What do umpires do in winter?"

"I don't know, but if the fans had their way, umpires would probably do time."

His Contribution.

"What will you put down on our contribution list, Mr. Jones?"

"My foot, sir."

Out of Use.

"This election is a hot proposition."

"Then why do they want to use a blanket ballot?"

A Frequent Cause.

"It is said that working will cure neurasthenia."

"Working the chin won't."

More Blind Males Than Females.

Of blind people eleven are men, to every nine women.

After all it is better to take a chance than to lose on a sure thing.